

Fine Arts Terminology – Full List

Abstract – art that looks as if it contains little or no recognizable or realistic forms from the physical world. Focus is on formal elements such as colors, lines, or shapes. Artists often “abstract” objects by changing, simplifying, or exaggerating what they see

Art – the completed work of an artist which is the expression of creativity or imagination, or both, that portrays a mood, feeling, or tells a story

Architecture – the art of designing and constructing buildings and other environmental features. Traditionally, the study of architecture has included monumental buildings such as cathedrals, temples, palaces and state buildings. In more modern times, it has expanded to other spaces including private homes, office buildings, restaurants and storefronts.

Baroque – the European art movement of the 1600s, in which artists attempted to move beyond the harmony and humanism of the Renaissance and express emotion, movement, drama and variety in their works.

Bronze – any of various alloys of copper and tin, sometimes with tin or other metals. It is commonly been used in casting sculpture and other three dimensional objects. A work cast in bronze is sometimes referred to as “a bronze.” These have traditionally included classical statues, particularly of politicians, mythic figures and figures on horses. T

Bust – a traditional statue type, a portrait of an individual from the chest up, or from the shoulders up. This form was first developed in classical art.

Ceramics – the art of making objects, such as pottery, out of clay.

Classical – this term has come to have several meanings. Originally it was used to describe the work of ancient Greece and Rome, and later came to include all art inspired by ancient Greek and Roman art, including that of the Renaissance period and beyond. Today the term is used to describe perfection of form, with an emphasis on harmony and unity and a restraint of emotion. Usually it is used to describe works that are representational but idealized. Art of this type often also features humanistic and rational, rather than supernatural themes or ideals.

Collage – a composition made by pasting together on a flat surface various materials such as newspaper, wallpaper, printed text, illustrations, photographs and cloth.

Column – a vertical, weight-bearing architectural member, round and consisting of a base, a shaft and topped by a capital. Columns are most closely associated with classical art and architecture.

Composition – the arrangement of the design elements within the design area, for example the placement of objects (houses, people, trees) within a painting. Design elements can refer not only to objects, but also to lighting, color, lines, etc. This refers to the ordering of the visual and emotional experience, to give unity and consistency to a work of art and to allow the viewer to comprehend its meaning.

Conservation - the restoration and preservation of works of art.

Contrast the difference or opposition of various elements, such as color, lighting or texture, within an artwork.

Curator - the person in charge of a museum or art collection, particularly of designing exhibits, developing programming and arranging the purchase or loaning of art objects.

Decorative arts – describes art forms such as ceramics, enamels, furniture, glass, ivory, metalwork and textiles, especially when they take forms used as interior decoration. These art forms are sometimes distinguished from “fine arts” such as painting and sculpture and are referred to as “crafts”

Docent - a person who is a knowledgeable guide, who conducts visitors through a museum and delivers a commentary on the exhibits

Exhibition/Exhibit – A large-scale and unified public showing of art objects, usually organized around a theme, such as a particular artist, movement or culture.

Figure - a representation, pictorial or sculptural, of an object, particularly of a person

Foreground - the ground or parts situated, or represented as situated, in the front; the portion of a scene nearest to the viewer

Gallery – a room or a series of rooms where works of art are displayed.

Gothic – the name given to the style of painting, architecture and sculpture of the later Middle Ages, between the 12th and 15th centuries, particularly to art of England and France. Often contain dramatic, decorative designs, and non-naturalistic colors, poses and perspective.

Graphic art – two-dimensional art forms such as drawing, painting, photography, engraving, etching and illustration. Any art form that consists of a flat, two-dimensional surface.

Graphic design – the applied art of arranging image and text to communicate a message. It may be applied in any media, such as print, digital media, video, animation, product decoration, package and signs.

Harmony – the unity of all the visual elements in a work of art. This is often achieved through balancing elements within a work, and repeating similar or complementary elements throughout. As a result of such balance, all components of a work form a complete unit.

Horizon line – in a two-dimensional work, such as a painting, the line where land or water ends and sky begins. This feature is most commonly visible in landscapes. A horizon line is often included to give a sense of depth of perspective, the feeling that an image is not flat but projects back into three-dimensional space.

Hue – the name of a color, such as red, green or yellow.

Idealized – describing art which depicts objects not as they exist in reality, but rather in perfect, ideal terms.

Impressionism – a loose spontaneous style of painting that originated in France around 1870. This style focused more on capturing the feeling of a scene or subject using a rough, sketch-like style and bold colors rather than recording minute details.

In-the-Round/ Freestanding Sculpture – representational, three-dimensional art works that stand on their own (rather than being attached to a larger structure, such as a wall). The benefit and challenge of these types of statues is that they are fully developed for all points of view

Industrial design – the design of mass-produced or everyday products

Landscape – an image, such as a painting, photograph or drawing, which depicts outdoor scenery, often expanding far into the distance. They typically include trees, streams, buildings, fields, mountains, and wildlife.

Leading lines – prominent lines in a composition, such as a horizon line or the edge of a figure or building, which directs the viewer's eye around an image.

Marble – a type of stone typically used in sculpture and architecture, dense, fine-grained, capable of taking a high polish and often irregularly veined and colored by impurities. White marble has been quarried in Greece, Italy, Turkey, India, China and the United States. The name marble is sometimes used to refer to any stone that takes a polish, although such stones may include alabaster, granites and serpentines in addition to true marbles.

Masterpiece – a work done with extraordinary skill or effort, which represents an exceptionally great achievement during an artist's career.

Medium – refers to the material or technique that an artist works in, such painting or photography

Mixed Media – an art technique where an artist employs different kinds of physical materials and combines them into a single work. For example, Pablo Picasso produced *mixed media* works that incorporated both painting and newspaper clippings.

Modernism – a 19th and early 20th century art movement characterized by the deliberate departure from tradition and the use of innovative forms of expression, including new types of paints and other materials, a rejection of naturalistic colors and forms, the creation of abstraction rather than reality, the expression of non-visual subjects, such as feelings, ideas and dreams, the use of choppy, clearly visible brush strokes. Art of this period also became influenced by a broader set of influences than ever before, including non-western (Asian, African, Native American, etc) art, literature, science, psychology and politics.

Mosaic – an art medium in which small pieces of colored glass, stone or ceramic tiles are embedded into a background material such as plaster or mortar to create a single work, usually either an abstract design or a picture.

Mural – a large design or picture, most commonly created on the wall of a public building. Usually applied either with paint or mosaic technique.

Negative space – space in a composition that is blank, which is not occupied by an element or form.

Neo-Classicism – an 18th Century French art movement that originated as a reaction of the irrationality and drama of the Baroque. It sought to revive the ideals of the classical art of ancient Greece and Rome, and often used classical forms, such as columns, domes, arches and classical statue forms, to express ideas about courage, sacrifice and love of country. A classic example in the United States would be the inclusion of classical features, such as columns and a dome, in the architecture of the Capitol Building in Washington DC.

Nude – an artistic representation of a nude human figure. Nudes have been prevalent since Classical times and are used both for intense study of anatomy and posture and idealization of the human form.

Oil paint – a type of paint made from color particles (pigment) and linseed oil. It first became widely used during the late 16th Century.

Pastel – a crayon made from pigment mixed with gum and water and pressed into stick-shaped form. Pastels allow an artist to easily blend colors together. A variation is the oil pastel, a crayon that is oil-based.

Perspective – the art of picturing objects on a flat surface so as to give the appearance of distance or depth; the art of creating the illusion of three-dimensions on a two-dimensional surface.

Picture plane – the surface of a picture

Pigment – finely powdered coloring matter mixed or ground with various other materials (like oil, gum or water) to form mediums like crayon and paint.

Pop art – a style of art that seeks its inspiration in commercial art and items of mass culture, such as comic strips, popular foods and brand name packaging). A classic example would be Andy Warhol's famous painting of a Campbell's soup can.

Portrait – an artistic representation of a person

Positive space – space in a composition that is occupied by an element or form

Postmodernism – art, architecture or literature that reacts against earlier modernist principles, either by reintroducing traditional or classical elements of style or by carrying modernist styles or practices to new extremes.

Pottery – a form of ceramics where wet clays are formed and then dried, then fired to harden them and make them water proof.

Realism – a style of art that depicts subject matter (form, color, space, etc) as it appears in actuality, without distortion or stylization. This term refers to art that is created to replicate reality.

Relief sculpture – a type of sculpture in which forms project from a background. This type of sculpture is often used to decorate the sides of buildings. It is the opposite of freestanding sculpture.

Renaissance – a revival or rebirth of cultural awareness and learning that took place during the 14th and 15th centuries, particularly in Italy, but also in Germany and other European countries. The period was characterized by a renewed interest in ancient Greek and Roman art and design and included an emphasis on human beings, their environment, science, and philosophy.

Representational – describing art that intends to depict objects, ideas, or events in a recognizable, readable manner.

Surrealism – an art style developed in Europe in the 1920s, characterized by using the subconscious as a source of creativity, using irrational or unexpected subjects and an atmosphere of fantasy.

Sculpture – any three-dimensional form created as an artistic expression. Sculpture is primarily concerned with space: occupying it, relating to it, and influencing the perception of it.

Self-portrait – a portrait an artist makes using himself or herself as the subject.

Sketch – a rough drawing used to capture the basic elements and structure of a potential artwork, often used as the basis for a later, more detailed work.

Still life – a painting or other two-dimensional work of art representing inanimate objects such as fruit or flowers.

Watercolor – a water-based paint that is a translucent wash of pigment. Paintings done with this medium are known as “watercolors.” Watercolors are typically applied and spread with brushes onto wet or dry paper, resulting in a “wet-on-wet” or “wet-on-dry” technique.